

question, "Shall Jackson have our homes, shall we move westward at his command?"

Monroe had sent his messenger, Andrew Jackson, to request a peaceful removal, beyond the Mississippi, to the newly formed Indian Territory. Deeply unwilling were the Choctaws to surrender home and dear associations.

The fourteenth day had thus drawn to a close, and yet the question remained unanswered. The excitement was intense but there was not outward manifestation. It was known that Pushmatahaw would give his decision just as the moon overtopped the trees and flooded the valley with her brilliancy.

Silent as spectres stood the Choctaw warriors; the slow regular breathing of the many men sounded terribly distinct in the still air. Suddenly every eye was directed to the chief. The council fire flickered in the moonlight casting a wierd unearthly shadow on the cold, passionless visages of the royal circle. A wave of sudden chill passed over the heart of many a brave unknown to fear. A vague expectancy, filled with dread, made their efforts to appear indifferent almost vain. Pushmatahaw arose, and facing his people, he spoke in measured accents, the soft cadences of the musical voice and language fell gently on the waiting warriors.

"My people, all my thoughts are wrapped in you! Long have I pondered over this mighty problem and to the same end have my ideas ever tended. Fear not, I give not lightly the land of our ancestors, the homes of our kindred. Long may our Yazoo resound to the hunting cry. Manitou the Mighty ever love and protect you."

A deep murmur of approval shook the ranks of the braves. Turning to Jackson and his men who stood near by Pushmatahaw said:

"Jackson, thou art saluted, and do thou salute the Great White Father,

but tell him from his Indian friends that years have passed, treaties have often been made with Spaniards and with French, and never have we yielded one foot of ground. We cannot part with our hearts and live, neither can we give our Yazoo valley to you and yet exist. We move not towards the setting sun, the Manitou regards not lovingly its cold bleak land. Ye are answered, depart in peace.

"Extinguish the council fire, my men." The chieftain leaped from his seat, but hardly had he touched the burning brands when a hand arrested him. Black and heavy had grown the frown on Jackson's swarthy face, between his close set teeth came a smothered curse. The blood rushed in dark red streams to his forehead until the massive veins seemed ready to burst. Snatching an axe from a brave, he drew it far backward and advancing he hurled it with all his strength into a tree, by the side of the stately chief. Deeper and yet deeper sank the axe until buried in the very heart. Then in accents harsh with passion Jackson cried:

"So surely as this axe strikes into this tree, by the God above, I swear to strike to the hearts of your people, Pushmatahaw, if you rescind not your decree, I will have your land, by treaty or by war."

Pushmatahaw rose, and his deep thrilling words echoed long. "Revoke my decree! You who found your noblest warriors at Horse Shoe Bend, the Choctaw braves, presume to imagine that a warrior lightly retracts? Can threats influence one of the Hyahpaktuhlo clan? Strike to the heart." Low and scornful laughed the chief. "Then strike; am I not a fair mark? Think you I am fearful of death? My days have been many; you but send me earlier to the Manitou." Under his breath he whispered,